

# Humankind and Nature



Humankind and Nature:  
An Endangered System of Interdependence  
in Today's Globalising World

Edited by

Albert Wong and Artur K. Wardega, SJ

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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An Endangered System of Interdependence in Today's Globalising World,  
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**Leiquan WANG (王雷泉)** was born in Shanghai in 1952. He enrolled in the Philosophy Department of Fudan University in 1978, where he stayed as a tutor in 1984. He is professor of philosophy at Fudan University, teaching courses in Principles of Religious Studies, History of Buddhist Philosophy, Selective Readings of Buddhist Original Works, Topics in the

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## FOREWORD

Since the 1960s, concepts like “conservation” and “environment friendly” have become part of our language and to a lesser degree of our lifestyle. When it comes to facing these issues, religions are positioned *par excellence* to teach about and deal with the relationship between man and his environment. Eastern thought has many references to this, notably 天人合一 *tian ren he yi* (unity of humankind and nature), and there is also an equally reflective teaching in Western religion (Christianity) expressed in the first divine invitation to man: “to fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:1–3:23). Where are we now with the response of major religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Taoism, to this particular call?

Today’s relationship between man and nature is defined by economic development. With the great impact on other forms of life and also human suffering and poverty, however, this “development” could be seen as a myth. Billions of people experience growing vulnerability to food and water shortages, wars and environmental disasters. Much of the challenge is related not only to science and technology but also to neo-liberalist economic policy. Again, where has religion helped to deepen this human engagement with resource development and the need for balance? How does religion contribute to bringing about a greater human consciousness of the value of the gift of life? Where is the celebration of creation?

The economic development that guides science and technology has greatly contributed to today’s crisis in the relationship of humans to nature. Conservation and actions to protect the environment have been aimed to remedy this problem, but this relates very much to an urban middle class’s re-discovery of this relationship and easily blames or excludes the rural poor as part of the problem. Ecology is an “-ology,” a study, science or ideal that is not always inclusive of all of humanity, especially of people at the margins. We as humanity are not one, nor are we one with that into which we were created.

Nowadays the elites in our societies dominate not only creation but also humanity, and consequently our participation in globalization is unequal. When dogs in condominiums often eat better than children in the streets of many of our global cities, it is clear that our humanity is no longer what includes us in a common fellowship. What has development done to humanity? Does it always have to be advanced technologies that

give us a comfortable lifestyle? We are still working here in the realm of comfort zones, and there is no place in any of this for religion that speaks of limits, or even cutbacks, and that accepts and enters into human suffering.

Man does not merely influence nature in a destructive way; it is as if all men, women and children are in a battle to triumph over the realities of nature. There is a struggle for power in the dominant human self-image, while there is a lack of self-reflection as part of nature, and of recognition of human needs, especially in terms of suffering and limits of moral values.

In this particular context we can consider the role of religions and seek their valuable contributions. Religion's role is not simply one of morality; rather, it seeks, especially in Christianity, to show the face of God. It is out of this relation that we then seek to live towards the "good," especially in relation to our neighbours, creation and God. Religious believers may have failed severely in communicating this relationship in the twenty-first century.

Our present publication gathers a roster of Western and Asian experts' contributions from various fields of knowledge related to ecology, anthropology, religions and ethics, economics, technology, and to environmental and health protection studies. The essays selected embrace a wide scope of current topics, theme and questions, such as the following.

Whilst globalization has increased the interconnectedness and interdependence of people, many key features of humanitarian society have been eclipsed. Is there any way to restore the humanitarian, ethical and non-materialistic aspects of humankind? And how?

In an Asian confessional context, how to sustain vitality in the face of diminished resources coupled with greater consumer demands?

In the Christian community in Taiwan the awareness of the ecological crisis is not sufficiently acute. How about "ecological ethics" being seriously taken into consideration as a part of its belief?

Buddhism changes the world by changing human minds: what is the ecological role of the doctrine of the union between mind and matter, and the call for cultivation of the pure mind?

The Buddhist inspiration to environmentalism is 唯心淨土 *wei xin jingtu* (mind-made pure land); this contains a demonstration that the pure mind can lead to pure acts and to a pure land on earth *par excellence*.

三廢 *san fei* (three wastes) and China's administrative system of environmental protection.

Economic inquiry and the insatiable demand for the satisfaction of populations' growing needs.

People's greed and arrogance lead to the destruction and vicissitudes of the major 乾坤 *Qiankun* (heaven and earth); Dharma Master Chen Yen proposes a remedy in her environmental concept and practice.

Transformative learning by the encounter with indigenous people: a field study in northern Mindanao (Philippines).

Modern technology and the spread of Chinese Buddhist texts as an instrument for improving the lives of humankind. A case for printing and distributing the sacred texts of the Buddhist tradition.

How to implement dignity and sustainability in a cancer hospital? Facing death in modern China's health institutions.

Thus, the essays presented in this book reveal and share with its readership the ecological thoughts within the various faith confessions, and the ways of their implementation, to respond to the needs of the human being, and are especially addressed to our disadvantaged brothers and sisters. While relying on a good number of examples within the analyzed cases, they illustrate a positive relationship between religion and ecology in their empirical experience, coming in particular from the geographically and ethnically diverse Asian continent. Unfortunately, national and economy-dictated interests of the so-called power-generation often seem to have preceded scientific, ecological and social considerations. What is more, the unequal distribution of benefits may also imply future tensions among the countries in the region.

Looking back at the city we are in, Macau, we may notice that rapid development, ecology issues and social justice are all in conflict. As the city re-integrates itself into the globalized economy through liberalizing its

gaming industry, its wetland and hills have been given away to casino-resorts and housing projects. Government bodies have reserved part of the wetland for more than one hundred species of birds, including the vulnerable black-faced spoonbill. They also hold education programs and campaigns to raise public awareness of ecological issues. However, taking the green areas as an example, the majority of the effort is concentrated in the richer but less populated “South.”

However, in respect of the above, we are glad to note the city’s recent environmental actions, such as a campaign for the preservation of the “white heron bushes” in Old Taipa, the advocacy against the consumption of endangered species, and the collection of plastic materials on the Coloane beaches. This is also a sign of reconnection by the city’s residents to the rest of the world, since the ecological system is a whole and is inseparable from one location to another.

*In fine*, on behalf of the Macau Ricci Institute, we would like to express our gratitude to the members of the Scientific Committee, especially to Father Luis Gutheinz, SJ, Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Fu Jen University in Taiwan, to Father Peter Walpole, SJ, Director of the Institute of Environmental Science for Social Change, Manila, Philippines, and the founding member of the “Ecology and Jesuits in Communication,” to Professor Christopher Key Chapple, Doshi Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology at the Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, USA, as well as to Father Dominique Tyl, SJ, professor at the St. Joseph Catholic University of Macau and officer for the “Ecologically Friendly Jesuit Communities and Institution” in the Jesuit Chinese Province, who have provided us insights and help with the organization of our conference. We would also like to thank Professor Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-founder and co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology of Yale University, who has generously allowed us to make a presentation of the documentary *The Journey of the Universe* at the conclusion of the conference.

We hope that the present collection of essays will renew awareness of the ecological dilemma and stimulate reflection on its spiritual and social dimensions. May the revisited academic reflection contribute to the human effort for the better and more just use of our environmental resources while ensuring basic human and natural rights, making this world a better place for all to live in harmony with flora and fauna, and with respect for its ecological system.

Artur K. Wardega, SJ  
Albert Wong



# I

## REFLECTIONS ON RELIGIONS AND ECOLOGY



# CHAPTER ONE

## ASIAN RELIGIONS AND ECOLOGY

### CHRISTOPHER KEY CHAPPLE

Asia extends from the Himalayan Mountains southward to the Indian Peninsula and Southeast Asia as well as eastward through China to the Korean Peninsula. The peoples of Asia have lived continuously in this complex environment for thousands of years, seeking to live in balance within the limits of each specific geo-region. These regions include the Tibetan Plateau, various deserts and mountain ranges, as well as verdant river valleys and deltas. In years past, the populations of Asia sustained themselves through local agriculture, venturing outward for purposes of trade. Natural and human-made calamities periodically have interrupted the balance of life in Asia, the result of earthquakes, monsoons, floods, droughts, and warfare. Religion in its various forms has sought to understand and enhance human experience within the rhythm of the seasons in each of these places. This work has taken the form of rituals and practices that help people harmonize and find their place of peace within the cosmic order. The religious process was referred to as Rta in early Hinduism, as Dharma in Buddhism, and as the Dao in Confucianism and Daoism.

#### **Hinduism: Rta**

These early worldviews provided a context within nature and human interaction that provided ongoing stability, particularly when linked with cultural practices as expressed in law. The idea of Rta, as articulated in the Rg Veda, “Stands as the body of the Norm, the accumulations of practices, customs, goals, and rules of survival for a community within which individuals are born and foreigners accepted. In this sense, the Rta is the moving body of the social group, of the embodied community.”<sup>1</sup> Various

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio T. de Nicolas, *Meditations through the Rg Veda: Four Dimensional Man* (York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 1976), 163.

gods and goddesses of the Vedas, dating from at least 3,500 years ago, manifest Rta each in a special way. Agni, the god of fire, brings light to heaven and earth. Varuna, the god of social stability, “shows one how to cross over darkness into Rta.”<sup>2</sup> The goddess of dawn, Usas, the river goddesses, and Indra, the warrior god who releases the life-giving monsoons, all move in accord with Rta. It is even said that “there is no effective thought which is not born of Rta.”<sup>3</sup> By participating in sacrifices and rituals that are attuned to the seasons, one can achieve cosmic order and harmony. The concept of Rta held so much weight in the early Indo-European context that the word itself has migrated into modern English in various forms: art, order, rite, ritual, coordinate, ordain,<sup>4</sup> as well as the obvious cognate, rhythm. The Sanskrit word derives from the Indo-European root *r*, which means to move or go; Mahony writes that the word indicates “a principle of harmony in which all things move together smoothly and support each other in a fitting manner.”<sup>5</sup> In the Vedic tradition, worship and sacrifice performed for particular gods yield the benefits symbolized by that deity. For instance, homage to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, brings one closer to wealth; homage to Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge, brings success in studies, and so forth.

### **Buddhism: Dharma**

The teachings of the Buddha are known collectively as the Dharma. According to the key principles of Buddhism, human greed, delusion, and hatred cause suffering. By working to stop the influx and outflow of such tendencies, the attendant suffering can be mitigated, bringing peace not only to the individual but to the broader community as well. The Buddha himself wandered for six years attempting different techniques, such as meditation and fasting, in order to purify his body, mind, and emotions. Eventually he came upon a middle path and established an order of monks to whom he preached three core ideas: the world is impermanent, it is suffused with suffering, and there is no enduring ego self that can ever hope to control everything. These teachings resulted in the development of an eightfold path of reasoned analysis and pacification of the mind through meditation, which allowed 500 individuals to attain nirvana during the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> William K. Mahony, *The Artful Universe: An Introduction to the Vedic Religious Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 3, 46, 261.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 235.

lifetime of the Buddha. Restraint, for Buddhists, holds the key to liberation.

The word Dharma derives from the Sanskrit root *dhr* which means to hold. By holding one's impulses in check and by working for the sake of the community rather than the fulfillment of selfish desires, Buddhists pursue a life characterized by introspection and ethical reflection. Though Buddhism arose in India, its influence has helped shape virtually all Asian and even Pacific cultures, from Afghanistan to Hawaii.

### **Confucianism and Daoism: Restraint and Flow**

The writings of Confucius and Lao Zi have come to define East Asian cultural sensibilities. Confucius emphasized the practice of virtue, later fine-tuned into a practice of self-cultivation by the Neo-Confucians. Confucius wrote:

Humanity (*jen/ren*) is the distinguishing characteristic of the human being, and the greatest application of it is in being affectionate toward relatives. Righteousness (*i*) is the principle of setting things right and proper, and the greatest application of it is in honoring the worthy.<sup>6</sup>

Lao Zi extolled the virtues of no-effort and the beautiful example provided by nature as the key to self-fulfillment and balance. He wrote:

The softest things in the world overcome the hardest things in the world.  
Non-being penetrates in that in which there is no space.  
Through this I know the advantage of taking no action.  
Few in the world can understand this teaching without words  
and the advantage of taking no action.<sup>7</sup>

Lao Zi invoked the valley and water as central exemplars or metaphors for optimum behavior:

The spirit of the valley never dies.  
It is called the subtle and profound female . . . .  
The best person is like water.  
Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Doctrine of the Mean, 20," in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, translated and compiled by Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 104.

<sup>7</sup> "Tao Te Ching, 43," in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 8, 142–43.

These complementary systems suggest that, on the one hand, human effort is essential to establish equilibrium, while on the other hand, doing nothing and simply witnessing and imitating the gentle side of nature will bring peace.

Like Buddhism, the cultural influence of these traditions spread beyond their homeland. Confucianism remains particularly strong in Korea, Japan, Singapore, and many parts of Indonesia. Daoism has become popular, particularly in Western countries. Both contain conceptual resources that can both bolster and inhibit environmental activism. Confucianism lends itself to strong governmental policies. If central governments embrace the need for ecological restoration, then Confucianism will assist in the enforcement of policy. However, if government values market growth and exploitation of resources more than sustainability, then the environment will suffer. Similarly, Daoism could be used to encourage appreciation of natural beauty leading to environmental concern, or its philosophy of *wu wei* could serve as a rationale for taking no action.

## **Environmental Degradation**

For the past three hundred years, Asia has been wracked by external and internal colonialism, political change, and, most recently, a full assault on traditional ways of living. With the advent of the industrial revolution and the conversion of agriculture from a family-based enterprise to a factory and commodity model, people have been driven in great numbers to the cities, where value is not found in the rhythm of the seasons and fulfillment with family and friends, but is driven by a market economy that values advancement, cleverness, and the acquisition of material goods. At the same time, natural resources are being diminished rapidly. Forests are being destroyed, those rivers that have been allowed to continue to flow have become polluted, and air quality has worsened. Cancer rates have escalated as Asian communities adopt such mistakes in the Western lifestyle as over-consumption of meat and the smoking and chewing of tobacco.

With the increasing abundance of material goods, from automobiles to fast food, India faces the challenge of losing its fundamental connection with the rhythms of life, as its sanctified and thoughtful approach to the material world becomes incrementally overwhelmed by the presence of things themselves. The values expressed in the concept of *Rta* in traditional Indian society take their expression through the arts and through the philosophical contemplation of the relationship between the witness and the observed. Observation or consciousness historically has

been accorded greater status in India than what is seen, resulting in an emphasis on interior states known as *bhavas*. The most elevated of these eight states, knowledge or *jnana*, brings insight that leads to a state of rarefied spiritual connection. The most troublesome *bhavas* cause one to wallow in attachment and weakness. These states determine one's interactions with the world. Understanding and controlling the *bhavas* takes precedence over any particular material manifestation; knowledge of things is greater than the things themselves. Gandhi cultivated a political view predicated on the supremacy of attitude over ownership, of the importance of a strong moral core over things. He brought the British Empire to its knees as a result of this philosophy. Nehruvian economic policies, rooted in Gandhian principles, slowed materialism and capitalism for several decades. With India's economic liberalization in 1991, industrialization and modernization have increased. India now boasts the world's largest middle class. But it also runs the risk of losing touch with its traditional values of *Rta* and its emphasis on interiority. India has paid very dearly for its industrial excesses, most notably the chemical disaster in Bhopal and the poisoning of its great rivers.

East and Southeast Asian countries have also been swept up into the world of economic growth, resource exploitation, and the rise of a powerful consumer middle class. Two great Buddhist leaders, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, have emphasized the need to remain mindful of the Buddha's teachings on impermanence and no-self in light of these developments. The Dalai Lama has repeatedly stated that we only have one planet and that solutions to planetary problems cannot come from either below or above, but must emerge from the care of human beings.<sup>9</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh has urged people to reflect on the reality of inter-being, the truth that all things depend on one another. He writes, "When we develop concentration on inter-being, on the interconnectedness of all things, we see that if we make them suffer they will make us suffer in return."<sup>10</sup> As awareness of the effects of industrial pollution becomes more widely known, a deeper appreciation of the Buddhist philosophy of causality and consequences will emerge. Buddhism, which began in India, has profoundly affected all cultures of Asia and has become increasingly influential in Europe and America.

Confucian propriety and the Daoist theory of flow present yet another way to approach issues of ecological concern. Mencius once commented that the whole world seems to hurt when one hears a tile fall and break.

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder, *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment Is a Religious Issue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Art of Power* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 24.

Likewise, as we see pictures of polluted waters, such as Tai Lake, China's third-largest body of freshwater, located near Shanghai, one cannot help but be repulsed by the lake "choked by toxic algae fed by the phosphates from the human and industrial waste that had been poured into the water and its tributaries."<sup>11</sup> Like the issues and obstacles facing the Ganges River cleanup, a complex network of competing interests makes it difficult to find the political resolve necessary to improve the situation. Factories throughout Asia need to close or relocate or invest in expensive wastewater systems. From a Confucian perspective, the right action would benefit both individuals and their expanding networks of family and friends. From a Daoist perspective, action would be seen as allowing the lake to return to its natural state, delivering it from the complexities and compromises fanned by human greed.

Environmental degradation brings new challenges to the religions of Asia. Meditation and ritual have always been engaged to bring peace of mind to the human situation. However, climate change, species loss, health risks, and other problems are requiring religions to ask new questions. What is the place of the human on the planet? What actions can be taken to ensure sustainable living? Traditionally, religious ethics were developed and adapted to address problems of human unhappiness. In contemporary times, religions must address planetary malaise in the form of severe weather events, loss of purpose in light of broken family structures, and a sad trivialization of material goods, including food, that were once revered as the source of all sustenance.

Asian worldviews must be newly interpreted in light of these new environmental demands. The vow-based personal ethics of Jainism, Buddhism, and Yoga offer a starting point for regaining a sense of personal connection and responsibility. The opening lines of the *Dhammapada* express the core problem and the solution:

(The mental) natures are the result of what we have thought,  
 are chieftained by our thoughts, are made up of our thoughts.  
 If a person speaks or acts with an evil thought,  
 sorrow follows that person (as a consequence)  
 just as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the cart.  
 If a person speaks or acts with a pure thought,  
 happiness follows that person like a shadow that never disappears.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "China: A Lot to Be Angry About," *The Economist*, May 3, 2008, 49.

<sup>12</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ed., *A Source Book of Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 292.

South Asia developed several systems for cultivating thoughts of purity. These include the five vows (*vrata/yama*) of Jainism and classical Yoga, the five perfections (*paramitas*) of Buddhism, and the four abodes or habits of mind (*Brahma-vihara*) of Buddhism and Yoga. By adopting these practices, conditioning of one's thought patterns can be shifted from compulsive, consumptive behavior to constructive consciousness.

Specifically, non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, sexual restraint, non-possession, and abstention from intoxicants constitute the vows and perfections, the preferred behaviors for all three traditions. These create an atmosphere of safety for oneself and one's associates and cultivate an overall climate of goodness. Parsimony and sobriety can be particularly instructive and useful tools for the cultivation of a personal and social environmental ethic. Parsimony suggests that we exercise extreme conservatism in our consumption of resources. Rather than driving and spending money on gasoline, it would be more economical to walk. Rather than eating out at a restaurant, eating at home nurtures a more intimate relationship with food; growing one's own food would further deepen this intimacy. Sobriety applies not only to abstention from intoxicants but also to a general outlook that takes into account the unseen consequences of human consumption. If one eats meat, huge resources of water and petroleum are needed: water to grow the fodder for the animal, and oil for fertilizer and transport. One useful tool for learning the sobering effects of lifestyle choices is the website [www.ecoprint.org](http://www.ecoprint.org), which allows one to see the consequences of one's decisions and lifestyle choices in regard to food and transportation.

On a personal level, these vows and perfections serve as the touchstone for making moral decisions. Before embarking on any course of action, an individual trained in these traditions would ask: Will this cause violence? Does this feel honest? Does this object freely belong to me? Will my amorous actions arouse passions and expectations with unintended consequences? How important is the ownership and holding of this thing? Will this substance cloud my judgment? One pauses before making a commitment, certifying that the action undertaken will yield happiness and not sorrow.

Another set of guidelines became the hallmark for enlightened behavior among both the Buddhists and the followers of Yoga. The Brahma Vihara urges one to cultivate friendliness toward those who are happy, compassion for those who suffer, sympathetic joy for the virtuous, and equanimity toward those bereft of virtue (*Yoga Sutra*: II:33). Again, these behaviors allow one to become anchored, equipped to deal with all manner of people and situations. In a two-step process, one first assesses



the circumstance. Are these people happy or unhappy? Are they dedicated to goodness and purity or the reverse? Once one determines which way the wind is blowing, an appropriate approach and demeanor can be employed. Seek out those who are happy and virtuous and enjoy their company without jealousy or envy. Be aware of those who are experiencing difficulty, and find generosity of heart. Stay clear of criminals and avoid falling for the allure of ill-gotten gains.

Both these systems were developed to allow for peace of mind within oneself and in one's interpersonal relationships. At times, they were used to rally people into mass movements, such as the Bishnois movement in Rajasthan, India, where villagers took a principled stand to stave off forest destruction. Many people lost their lives for the sake of protecting the trees and even today the Bishnois continue to guard and protect several species of large desert animals, including the Blackbuck.<sup>13</sup> Gandhi, although pre-dating the modern environmental movement, would have been appalled by the profligate waste that has permeated the consumer economy. Far from a philosophy rooted in the production of one's own homespun khadi cloth and the consumption of simple, homegrown vegetarian food, modern economics seems to value complex manufacturing and distribution chains, regardless of their net drain on resources, both human and natural.

This essay began with reference to the Himalayan Mountains, the one common geographic feature that dominates Asian identity and culture. The Himalayas, whose name means "Abode of the Snows," loom over the north of India and the far west of China. Their glacial waters feed most of Asia's great rivers: the Indus, the Ganges, the Yamuna, the Brahmaputra, the Irawaddy, the Mekong, the Yangtze, and the Yellow River. However, with the advent of global warming, their life-giving glaciers are receding, disappearing from the Himalayas just as they are diminishing in Alaska, Greenland, Montana, the Sierras, the Alps, and the Andes. M. C. Mehta, India's Goldman Environmental Prize-winning lawyer, commented in an interview that: "We must reduce greenhouse gas emissions so we can bring back the climate. The glaciers are melting. I saw this happen myself when I went to 14,000 feet there and even within one day, a huge chunk collapsed."<sup>14</sup> The consequences of glacier failure are difficult to comprehend. Each year precipitation at high elevations falls as snow and remains frozen. As temperatures mount, this ice has begun to melt at alarming rates. Within two decades, Glacier National Park in Montana will most likely have not a single glacier. In the Asian environment, where

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<sup>13</sup> See [www.bishnoi.org](http://www.bishnoi.org). See also Pankaj Jain, *Dharma and ecology of Hindu Communities: Sustenance and Sustainability* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Personal interview, December 2006, Eco Ashram, Rishikesh, India.

precipitation falls intensely for the three-month monsoon season, the failure of glaciers will result in horrendous flooding during the rainy season and dry riverbeds during the rest of the year. Without the steady flow of water, agriculture will wither and billions of people could potentially starve throughout Asia. A techno-optimist will advocate more and bigger dams. However, the scale of such a massive geographical change most likely will make such remedies impracticable. As M. C. Mehta has noted, the solution lies in slowing and stabilizing the climate.

We have discussed three key religious ideas that characterize Asian thought. Rta, translated as movement and rhythm, derives its imagery from the steady flow of life-giving rivers throughout India. Without the flow of water, engendered and set free by the god Indra, the bringer of the monsoon, Rta will lose its foundation. Dharma had been used by the Buddha to advocate sparing use of resources in order to curb human desire and its deleterious consequences. He urged followers of his Dharma to eat only twice each day, in the early morning and at midday, seeing this as a way to cultivate abstemiousness in the daily life of monks and nuns. Similarly, Jaina Dharma advocates fasting twice each month and for a full week in the late summer, allowing its adherents to achieve and maintain a state of spiritual purification. However, if the glaciers fail and crops disappear, humans will lose the luxury of self-purifying abstention from food and be forced to deal instead with famine. In Daoism, without the flow of pure water, of what use is the metaphor? Waters in China, such as Tai Lake, are already severely polluted. If the flow of the Yangtze and the Yellow River cease, what will happen? Will people perish without the metaphorical and literal presence of water?

The current situation demands a call for action, action that can be informed by religious symbols. Rta as Rhythm, Dharma as Order, and the Dao as Flow provide powerful wisdom and incentive for correcting human behavior. Rhythm provides constancy. Order provides stability. Flow provides agility and gracefulness. Rhythmic, repeating rituals celebrate the beauty of the natural world. These can and are being re-conceptualized with an environmental message in India.<sup>15</sup> Imaginative creation of new laws can bring about an order that will help limit human greed. Such laws regulating vehicle emissions are being enacted throughout Asia. Finding peace of mind to undertake these momentous self-correcting tasks can be made more palatable with a working philosophy of flow, acknowledging the limits of what one can do, and setting out to do one's best. These three

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<sup>15</sup> See Vasudha Naryanan, "One Tree Is a Thousands Sons: Hindu Responses to the Problems of Ecology, Population, and Consumption," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 2 (January 1997), 291–332.

tools, arising from traditional Asian wisdom, can help the world move toward doing what must be done. Acknowledging and celebrating the rhythms and cycles of life will help people establish and abide by a new earth-friendly order, taking joy in a new flow requiring imagination and creativity.

Eban Goodstein, Professor of Economics, has summarized the coming challenge as follows:

This is a moment in history that demands a new politics. For some of us, this will be a politics grounded primarily in a concern for our children and grandchildren and for the people across the globe who will suffer from global heating. For others, it will be motivated as well by the clear recognition that the diversity of life on Earth is at stake... polar bears, salmon, seals, chimpanzees, cheetahs, corals and frogs and trees and tortoises and bees and birds... We need smart, aggressive action from government to cap emissions of global-heating pollutants and push for a new generation of clean-energy technologies... so that they will be there when our children need them.<sup>16</sup>

On January 31, 2008, Goodstein helped organize events across the United States to educate the new generation about the urgency of these issues. "Over 1900 colleges, universities, high schools, middle schools, faith organizations, civic groups and businesses sponsored panels, workshops, theater events, technology fairs, poetry readings, keynotes, sculpture displays, poster sessions and debates on the topic of Global Warming Solutions for America."<sup>17</sup> This sort of grassroots activism will hopefully raise awareness and prompt individuals and governments to make needed changes.

Asia has already seen the effects of a rampant market-driven economy and the emptiness of a possession-driven lifestyle. Asia has for thousands of years been aware of the critical need for a reliable source of food. Both India and China endured horrendous famines in the twentieth century. As the price of food and fuel continue to increase, humans worldwide will be driven to a deeper appreciation of its precious resources. To protect the well-being of the planet, governments and consumers must make reasonable choices that will conserve, rather than exploit and squander, the abundance of the planet.

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<sup>16</sup> Eban Goodstein, *Fighting for Love in the Century of Extinction: How Passion and Politics Can Stop Global Warming* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2007), 141–42.

<sup>17</sup> See [www.focusthenation.org](http://www.focusthenation.org), May 12, 2008.

Human beings have a choice. They can fall prey to the sort of fear that arises in times of scarcity. This traditionally has resulted in war. The other option invites human ingenuity to find and implement reasoned and reasonable solutions. Asian cultures can help become part of the solution, with traditions informed by the rhythms of life and a desire for the order and peace that flows from restraint and balance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EMERGING EARTH COMMUNITY: CREATIVITY AND THE ENVELOPING POWERS

BRIAN THOMAS SWIMME  
AND MARY EVELYN TUCKER

The challenge of conscious self-awareness is unlike anything that has occurred for millions of years. We are finding ourselves in the midst of a vast transition. How are we to respond? For we sense we are in a dark night. We dwell in unknowing and yet grope forward. The path is still unclear.

With what shall we navigate?

The path is uncertain because our sense of larger purpose and destiny is clouded. We are seeking patterns that connect us to a vaster destiny – a vital participation in Earth’s unfolding. There is nothing more mysterious than destiny – of a person, of our species, of our planet, or of the universe itself. But in the modern era the question was considered unimportant compared with the practical necessities of commerce and trade.

Our puzzlement regarding our destiny is especially poignant since everything else in the universe seems to have a role. The primeval fireball had the work of bringing forth stable matter. The stars had the work of creating the elements. The same is true on Earth. Each species has its unique role to play for the larger community. The phytoplankton in the oceans fills the air with oxygen and thus enables every animal to breathe. That is their great work, to fill each lung with nourishing breath.

But do we humans have such a role? With respect to the universe itself – is there a reason for our existence? Is there a great work required of us?

Throughout the modern period, we have often been dissatisfied with the traditional answers concerning human destiny. Maybe this restlessness reveals something significant in our deep nature. Other species found their biome and settled into it, but nothing has seemed to satisfy us fully. Every

place we went we felt we were at home, yet not at home. Some urge carried us forward from place to place.

Perhaps our destiny has something to do with this desire to journey and to experience the depths of things. Perhaps that is why we are here – to drink so deeply of the powers of the universe that we become the human form of the universe. To become not just nation-state people, but universe people. To become a form of human being that is as natural to the universe as the stars or the oceans. Knowing how we belong and where we belong so that we enhance the flourishing of the Earth community.

## **Wonder and the stars**

In this process of becoming human we are searching for ongoing guidance. We will need to know what we can rely on. So many of our former certainties are gone now, or are in the process of changing. In order to move into the future we need to know what will be there for us.

First of all, there are the stars. We can count on their presence, their immense fiery light. In the depths of night they are a reassurance that we can find our way. They stun us with their beauty, drawing us into wonder. This sense of wonder is one of our most valuable guides on this ongoing journey into our future as full human beings.

Wonder is a gateway through which the universe floods in and takes up residence within us. Consider the stars. They shone down on Earth for four and a half billion years. Then these new creatures emerged, these humans. What was different about them is that they were amazed every time they beheld the stars. Their amazement inspired works of art and science. Hundreds of thousands of years later, humans discovered that it was these stars that forged the elements of their bodies.

By dwelling in a world of wonder, humans were led to realize that they were children of the stars – something intuited in early myths and uncovered by modern science. They came to understand that everything in the universe then forms a huge interconnected family that we can call “all my relations.”

Wonder is not just another emotion; it is rather an opening into the heart of the universe. Wonder is the pathway into what it means to be human, to taste the lusciousness of sun-ripened fruit, to endure the bleak agonies of heartbreak, to exult over the majesty of existence.

The universe’s energies penetrate us and awaken us. Through each moment of wonder, no matter how small, we participate in the entrance of primal energies into our lives.